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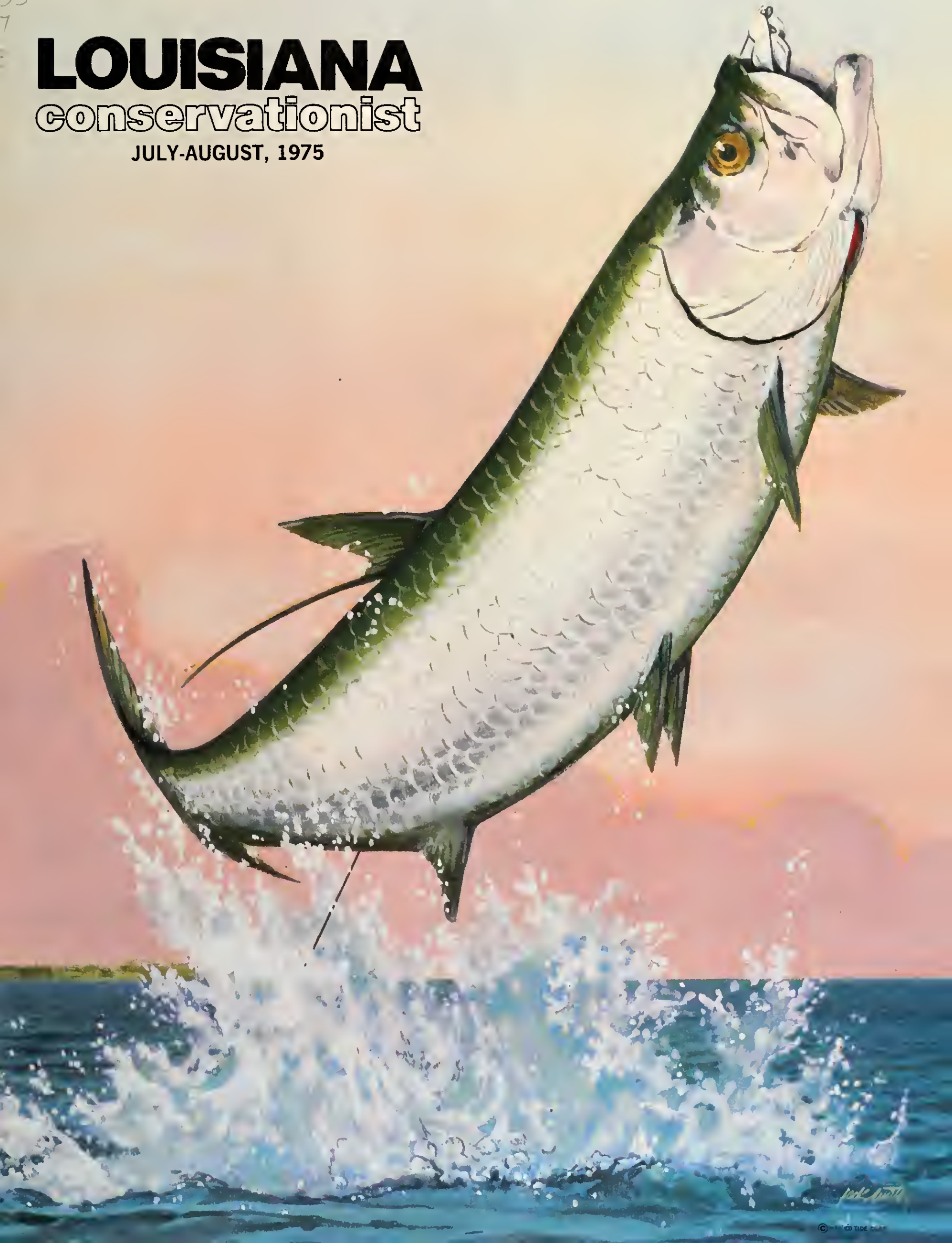
LOUISIANA conservationist

JULY-AUGUST, 1975



...comments

J. Burton Angelle, Director

When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.
—Aldo Leopold

With the wholehearted approval of Governor Edwin Edwards and the Louisiana Legislature, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission is aggressively pursuing its program of land acquisition. Acceleration of the program is spurred by the certain knowledge that land is being cleared at an alarming rate for agricultural and other purposes. Another factor adding impetus to the land acquisition program is that within a decade, it probably will be impossible to find suitable land at a price which the commission can afford.

Under the present Administration, three significant land purchases have been made and at the May 23 meeting of the commission in Alexandria negotiations were authorized for three additional tracts.

The program of outright acquisition of land, begun in 1960, was given impetus in September of 1972 when the commission purchased the 2,485-acre Loggy Bayou Wildlife Management Area in Bossier Parish. The name was derived from a historical stream that marks the eastern boundary of the area. When purchased, the tract contained a good deer herd and also offered quail, squirrel, rabbit hunting, and areas that would lend themselves to waterfowl shooting.

Roughly a year later, the program of outright acquisition was expanded substantially with the purchase of slightly over 9,951 acres of land immediately adjacent to the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area in St. Tammany Parish. This land purchase brought the total acreage of that management area to approximately 27,000.

It consists primarily of hardwood bottomlands laced with bayous and sloughs, providing ideal habitat for deer, wild turkey, squirrels, rabbits, and other forms of wildlife. It also offers excellent fishing, and waterfowl using the area are primarily wood ducks and mallards.

Like most wildlife management areas it offers excellent opportunity for hiking, boating, birdwatching and related outdoor recreational opportunities.

The land acquisition moved still further ahead in March of this year when 1500 acres were added to the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area. This area in Concordia Parish was increased to 14,638 acres with the March purchase. It provided one mile frontage on the eastern side of the area along the Mississippi River.

Like the earlier purchase, it provided additional habitat for deer, squirrel, swamp rabbit, woodcock and waterfowl. Borrow pits on the land offer excellent sport and commercial fishing.

Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area was further enlarged in May with the purchase of an additional 2,093 acres of land. This now brings the area, named due to its close proximity to the Mississippi, Old, and Red Rivers, to 16,731 acres.

The latest addition to the management area also consists of bottomland hardwoods offering excellent habitat for the same species of game found throughout the entire Three Rivers area. Additional borrow pits offer more sport and commercial fishing.

Both additions to the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area were purchased from funds appropriated to the commission by the Legislature in 1974, and the selection of land was made in accordance with the commission's policy of obtaining lands when practical adjacent to existing wildlife management areas.

Some areas of the recently acquired tracts lend themselves to upland game management programs which are aimed primarily at increasing the populations of quail available to hunters.

The new addition to the Three Rivers tract brings the total of land purchased outright by the commission and dedicated for all time to outdoor recreation to 205,932 acres.

This stepped-up acquisition of lands with funds provided by the 1974 Legislature continues. At the May meeting of the commission in Alexandria, it authorized the additional purchase of a 1,000-acre tract in Bossier Parish, a 3,924-acre tract in Avoyelles Parish, and another 700 acres of land in Avoyelles Parish.

I am certain that sportsmen, and all persons interested in outdoor recreation join in thanking Governor Edwards and the Legislature for such strong support of a program that will become increasingly more important to all people of Louisiana as time goes by.

LOUISIANA conservationist

Published bi-monthly by the Louisiana WildLife and Fisheries Commission in the interest of conservation of Louisiana's natural resources.

I give my pledge as an American to
save and faithfully to defend
from waste the natural
resources of my country—its soil
and minerals, its forest, waters
and wildlife.

EDWIN W. EDWARDS, Governor

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FRONT COVER—Louisiana Artist Jack Smith has sensitively captured the beginning of excitement that is tarpon fishing offshore Louisiana. A limited edition of this first in a series of Louisiana sport fishing lithographs, each signed and numbered by the artist, measuring 17" x 20" and suitable for framing, is available through Eb-Tide Corp., P.O. Box 19521, New Orleans, La. 70179, at $22.50 each, plus $1.50 for postage and handling.

Back Cover by Lloyd Poissenot. Species is the Common Snapping Turtle—*Chelydra serpentina*.

IN THIS ISSUE

KING OF THE COAST 4
With large bright eyes filled with frenzy, gill plates gaping, and blood-red gill tissue exposed, a tarpon fighting the sting of an imbedded hook provides the angler one of the most exciting aerial spectaculars of shallow-water fishing. *By McFadden Duffy*

THE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT STORY—IN PERSPECTIVE 10
Part one of a four-part feature, this installment goes into the biological need for management, the relationship between habitat and populations, and the real threat to wildlife, all compiled by the Wildlife Management Institute.

PURCHASE ENLARGES THREE RIVERS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA 14

LAKE CONCORDIA 15
A 1,000-acre Mississippi River oxbow lake near Ferriday affords some of the finest freshwater fishing, boating, and outdoor recreation in east-central Louisiana. Complete data facilities are included for the sportsman.

FROM RIGS TO REEFS 18
Oil industry platforms, commonly called "rigs", have dotted the horizon over the Gulf of Mexico for the past 28 years. And since the day the first one was erected, offshore fishing has been getting better and better. All the reasons why are in this article. *By McFadden Duffy*

WOODEN DECOYS ARE MAKING A COMEBACK 22
Louisiana Conservationist talks with one of the state's most noted authorities on the art of decoy carving. This piece confirms that there is much more to waterfowling than merely squeezing the trigger of a double-barrel shotgun. *By McFadden Duffy*

TURTLES WITH A TEMPER 26
Ancestors of the Age of Reptiles, Louisiana's two species of snapping turtles still roam the freshwater bodies of the state today. The common snapper and the loggerhead are the subjects of this photostory. *By Frank Davis*

PIE'S POTPOURRI 30
Taste-tempting summer recipes that center around the blue crab and its multiple uses in exquisite cuisine highlight this month's offering. *By Pie Pendley*

THE ATLANTIC STURGEON 31
One of the most intriguing fish known to man is also the claimant of an out-of-the-ordinary biological history. And while it is ugly, usually not caught on hook and line, and quite primitive in its genealogy, its flesh and its eggs are excellent tablefare.

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KING OF THE COAST

BY McFADDEN DUFFY

When an angler sets a hook in a tarpon, there is an explosion. There's no delayed action fuse in this fish. The water erupts and a platinum-silver streak shears the surface with the force of a depth charge exploding. The fish emerges with head thrashing and its gleaming body sparkling in the sunlight, lashing right and left in a wild attempt to free itself. If it doesn't throw the hook on that first jump, time and again this sky-climbing fish will burst from the surface in high, broad, twisting, tail-walking jumps making a bid for freedom.

With large bright eyes filled with frenzy, gill plates gaping, and blood-red gills exposed, it is the most spectacular show offered by any game fish of relatively shallow waters.

Ordinarily a tarpon makes at least one or two jumps, shaking wildly, right after the strike, then it is likely to rip off line in a mighty run and conclude that with another leap or two. Then a tarpon does a lot of its fighting under water. If the fisherman doesn't lose his fish by then it will return to the surface for more aerial attempts to free itself. More tail-lashing leaps follow, but not so fancy.

Depending upon the size of the tarpon, the type of tackle used, and the skill of the angler, the back-straining, tackle-torturing battle can last anywhere from a half-hour to an hour or more. When you finally whip your tarpon down you'll know it, for it will turn on its side—the final signal of surrender. Then it is ready for the gaff, to be boated if the fish is in competition, or brought alongside for hook removal and release.

One thing about the tenacious and tough tarpon to remember is that a "green" fish, one that isn't fully exhausted, should never be brought into the boat. The proverbial bull in the china closet would be mild compared to a thrashing, tail-whipping tarpon on the deck of an average fishing cruiser. There are countless tales of the damage wrought to both boats and individuals when over-eager anglers boat a fish too soon.

That's what a perfect session with a tarpon is like. There's the initial strike which may be but usually isn't expected even though there may be a large school of tarpon within sight, rolling in the water and putting on an impressive show, yet moody and not feeding. Then there's a power-packed battle characterized by astounding 10 to 15 foot lashing leaps, dogged runs that make a reel literally whine as it yields line in spite of a taut drag, the almost insufferable passage of time before the fish becomes exhausted, and finally the gaff.

There's little reason to wonder why tarpon fishermen are a dedicated clan or why they rightfully refer to their favorite fish as "silver kings." Other big game fishermen will boast of the fighting characteristics of blue and white marlin, bluefin and yellowfin tuna, graceful sailfish and dashing wahoo, but to hundreds of anglers wanting the ultimate in sport, the tarpon is king. To Gulf and lower Atlantic fishermen, the tarpon is king of the coast.

Before this idyllic word picture of a session with tarpon makes average anglers feel that tangling with tarpon is about as easy as a session with speckled trout when the specks are running big and plentiful, it should be pointed out quickly that tarpon fishing just isn't that easy. If going after tarpon could be compared to a poker game, the angler might be considered as facing a pat hand dealt from a stacked deck. Tarpon have a lot of things going for them.

Although completely toothless, the silver king is endowed by nature with the toughest, boniest mouth of any game fish that swims. This makes it most difficult to set a hook even when a tarpon can be lured into striking. Most veteran tarpon fishermen will agree that landing one out of every 12 silver kings that strike is a fine average. Anglers with less tarpon experience are reluctant to mention the number of strikes they may have received, waiting only for the day when they bring a silver king to gaff. In that case, one can count on it being treated with special care and hastily rushed to a good taxidermist.

In those violent, head-wagging leaps when a tarpon immediately realizes that it has mouthed a spoon, plug, or baited hook, there's that 12 to 1 chance that it is going to toss the lure before the hook can be deeply imbedded. So violent is that head-tossing that tarpon can throw the lure farther than the average fisherman can cast one with conventional gear. That's just one indication of the power built into this rugged game fish.

Another characteristic that tarpon anglers soon discover is that the fish must be hunted. They're unpredictable as the weather, perhaps even more so. A school of tarpon may be located in one area on a given day and be miles away the following day. This can result in long hours of cruising without seeing any tarpon. Lines are always kept out during those periods because there is a chance that the fish are down deep and one will rise with savage fury to smash a surface-trolled lure.

In hunting tarpon, anglers look for rolling fish. The sight of tarpon cavorting on the surface is always enough to make the pulses of fishermen quicken. Aside from being a pretty sight, it could mean that anglers are in luck. But that is just another uncertainty about tarpon fishing. It could signify that the fishermen are only going to have the tantalizing sight of their gleaming quarry. There's a reason for this and it calls for explanation.

Tarpon have lunglike gas bladders and when rolling on the surface they are generally taking in atmospheric air. This actually enables them to survive in waters with a low-oxygen content, or pass through areas where there has been almost total oxygen depletion. Rolling fish may be feeding or they may not. The latter is often the case, but locating a school of rolling

tarpon is certain to sharpen the anticipation of tarpon fishermen. You can bet they'll ease back on the throttles and linger in the area.

Rolling tarpon are the source of much speculation by anglers who fish silver kings. Some say that one can troll through a school of rolling tarpon and offer them everything in the tackle box, from spoons, jigs and plugs to mullets or blue crabs on hooks, without producing a strike. Others will swear that there's bound to be a few feeding tarpon in a large rolling school of fish. There are those who have had no luck with the surface tarpon but received a hefty strike when working weighted jigs under the surface fish.

Sometimes, not far from the rolling tarpon there will be cruising silver kings with dinner on their minds. They'll strike readily. This is why tarpon fishermen feel their chances are a heck of a lot better when they encounter rolling schools of tarpon. At any rate, aside from the supreme sport of hooking and battling a tarpon, there's no more appealing sight for the silver king devotee than to see "his fish" putting on a surface show.

Even though tarpon have been sought for nearly a half century by coastal anglers and the silver king is regarded as the finest game fish ever spawned by hundreds of fishermen in Louisiana alone, there has been relatively little research on tarpon. Some facts are known, but detailed research has never been carried out, probably because the tarpon is considered an inedible fish, being utilized as food only in some Central and South American countries.

From a biological standpoint, the tarpon is one of the world's oldest fish, dating back millions of years. It is a warm water fish and found in all of the warm areas of the world, including African waters. In the Americas they are found as far south as Argentina. Some excellent tarpon fishing can be enjoyed in the Chagres River of the Canal Zone. The San Juan River of Nicaragua offers excellent tarpon fishing, as does Lake Nicaragua. The Rio Encantado on the south coast of Cuba used to be a favorite spot for American tarpon fishermen. That was B.C. (Before Castro).

But why travel for silver kings when they are plentiful along the northern Gulf coast? From May, when the first tarpon of the Louisiana season is generally boated, until late September, they build up in numbers and provide the finest of sport fishing. Some fishermen are certain that the first arrivals come from the western Gulf, moving up from Mexican waters where they are plentiful during the winter. These fishermen also feel there is an eastward migration along the coast from Florida waters where they are believed by some to spawn. This has not been substantiated but is widely accepted as fact.

At any rate, tarpon fishing starts getting good in June. It's about tops in July, with August bringing a population density that holds on until September. Sometimes it appears that tarpon are more plentiful along certain areas of the Louisiana coast than they are at other spots. This may well be, but it varies from year to year, as revealed in tarpon rodeo statistics.

Bob Dennie

Even with inflationary prices, an angler can purchase a good rod, reel, proper line and wire leader material, lures, and a leather belt with butt cup for about $150. A comfortable fighting chair can be added as the wallet allows, but a dependable boat and basic equipment can be sufficient to take tarpon.

The all-time record tarpon catch for a Louisiana tournament took place during the 1966 Abbeville Kiwanis Tarpon Rodeo when 110 silver kings were brought to gaff and presented to the late weighmaster Marion Higgins. This has never been duplicated during any of the many popular summer tarpon rodeos, although some excellent catches have been made. One of these was during the 1947 Southwest Pass Tarpon Rodeo when 89 tarpon were taken.

How big do Louisiana tarpon run? Some small tarpon are taken in Louisiana waters but "baby" tarpon such as are landed daily in Florida waters are rare, indeed, in the Bayou State. This could tie into the common but unverified belief that tarpon spawn in Florida's inlets, bays and lagoons. The majority of the fish entered in approximately 15 annual Louisiana summer fishing rodeos featuring the silver king as the outstanding fish are all over 100 pounds. A survey over a period of years would indicate that 100-plus pound tarpon make up 90 percent of the competitive catch. It is safe to assume that the competitive catch is equal to those tarpon not taken in competition but by anglers merely seeking sport.

For the past quarter century the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association has been keeping official fish records for Louisiana. In each category, or species, the "Top Ten" are listed. As larger fish are entered, smaller fish are bumped from the list. With one exception, there have been many changes in the tarpon category during the quarter century mentioned.

One silver king remained at the top of the list for over two decades. This was a 198½ pound tarpon, taken by Oswald Frey in September 1951. During the years, the remaining nine listings changed periodically as larger tarpon were taken. Finally, in July 1973 Frey's big silver king was toppled into second place by a 206 pound silver king landed by Johnny A. Guidry during the Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo, Louisiana's oldest tarpon rodeo.

The 10th place tarpon as of this writing is a 183 pound silver king, taken by Mark Brown in July 1935. The remaining tarpon in the "Top Ten" for the category range upward from that weight. Worth noting is that with the exceptions of Frey's and Brown's tarpon, the additional eight fish in the category were all caught in the 1970's. Can this be indicative that Louisiana tarpon are running larger in recent years? Could it mean that there are more tarpon fishermen than in previous years? Or could it mean that fishermen have improved their techniques in fighting the big ones? There are more tarpon fishermen to-

Tarpon fishermen like to be in possibly productive waters at daylight. With lines out, the search for tarpon begins and will last all day until a frolicking school of tarpon is sighted. The sight of rolling tarpon will always quicken the pulses of those who go after silver kings.

Bob Denn

day than a decade ago, and it is obvious that they are catching bigger fish. These could be the answers.

For comparative purposes, the world record, all-tackle tarpon is a 283-pounder, taken in 1956 from Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela, by A. Salazar. This information was obtained from the International Game Fish Association.

Whenever fishermen gather and there is tarpon talk there are always anglers, both young and old, who develop a yen to tangle with a silver king. The first thing to consider is tackle. Best bet is to get with an experienced tarpon fisherman and look over his gear. The chances are that it will be a little more costly and elaborate than necessary. That's because fishing tarpon has become a passion with him and he wants the very best.

Even in these days of inflationary prices, any fisherman can properly equip himself with the necessary gear for tarpon fishing at a cost of about $150 or less. This will include a relatively stout rod, a 6/0 star drag reel spooled with 50-pound test line, a rod belt which is a cushioned leather belt with butt cup, and a basic assortment of hooks, plugs, feather dusters, and spoons. A gaff and gloves will round out the basic gear. This is about standard equipment, the only addition being wire leader material.

When it comes to boats, tarpon fishermen have certain preferences, but the accent on maneuverability is stressed. Fighting chairs, outriggers, and other more costly refinements can be added as the wallet allows but the essentials for taking tarpon are a rod and reel, leader and lure, a rod belt, and plenty of patience.

This basic gear will serve the tarpon fisherman in good stead for both trolling or still fishing. These are the two basic methods for fishing silver kings in Louisiana waters. The majority of tarpon taken are caught trolling, but there are a few dedicated silver king fishermen who have had remarkable success with still fishing.

Schuyler Thibodeaux, who holds third place in the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association "Top Ten" with a 195 pound tarpon is an outstanding example of an angler who consistently catches big tarpon still fishing. His big fish, caught September 1, 1973, was taken near the automobile bridge at the Rigolets at about 11:30 a.m. on a falling tide. Thibodeaux was using a croaker for bait and the big silver king scooped it off the bottom.

This marked a real comeback for Thibodeaux. Ironically, he had been in third place in the "Top Ten" in 1965 with a 166 pound tarpon. It was caught at the train bridge across Chef Menteur, mouthing a mullet that was being still fished. Then came the bonanza of big tarpon from West Delta waters and Thibodeaux was swept out of the "Top Ten" until his big silver king of 1973.

Taking of these two tarpon and numerous others in the Rigolets and Chef Menteur by anglers still fishing sheds some light on the habits of the often mysterious tarpon. There seems to be a definite migration of tarpon into Lake Pontchartrain through the Chef and the Rigolets in late August and September of each year. Just why this inshore movement takes place at that particular time of the year is not easy to explain, but it is an annual occurance, making southeast Louisiana possibly one of the state's best areas for still fishing late in the summer.

Worth repeating, for emphasis, is the fact that Oswald Frey's 198½ pound silver king that held first place in state records for better than two decades was a "Pontchartrain" tarpon, caught at the old Pointe aux Herbes lighthouse way back in September of 1951.

Although they have taken some outstanding tarpon and catch silver kings with regularity, anglers who still fish for tarpon are in the minority. By far the greatest number of tarpon taken in Louisiana waters are caught trolling. This is probably because trolling allows anglers to cover larger areas of possibly productive waters. There are some tarpon fishermen who are convinced that the movement of a boat attracts the attention of tarpon that may be feeding down deep, bringing them to the surface where they are likely to see a darting, gleaming spoon or the swift, smooth movement of a feather duster, or the erratic, darting surge of a plug.

During the half century that tarpon fishing has developed from a some-

Bob Dennie

In hunting silver kings, tarpon anglers search for schools of rolling tarpon. Often when they are cavorting on the surface they are merely taking air into gas bladders. They may or may not be feeding but there's always the chance that a hungry silver king will be cruising with the school.

what exciting, experimental sport to a full-fledged angling attraction that gets into the blood of some anglers and makes them converts for life, spoons have become more popular than tarpon plugs. In some areas of Louisiana, particularly in the Lafourche Parish stretch of bayou country, there's a tendency to use exceptionally large spoons. Perhaps the belief is that the larger the spoon, the larger the fish. This may be only a theory but don't knock it. Tarpon fishermen down that way have racked up an impressive reputation when it comes to taking silver kings.

Plugs are still popular with some tarpon fishermen even though they are not used as widely as they were about a half century ago when the sport of tarpon fishing began to emerge as the finest angling that one could find along the coast. Tackle shops offer a variety of plugs, the most popular being red in front and white on the tail half. Some are jointed to provide more action in the water and each is equipped with a chrome teaspoon-shaped lip that causes it to dart and wiggle in the water while being trolled.

In cabin cruiser talk sessions and sometimes at tarpon club meetings, talk will get around the the supreme thrill of landing "baby" tarpon on fly rods or spinning tackle. It doesn't take much imagination to realize what a terrific battle this must be, because young tarpon have all the fighting characteristics of the larger members of the species. They'll leap repeatedly, putting on a spectacular aerial show and alternate the leaps with dogged runs that will strain light tackle almost to the breaking point. This is fun to read about and talk about, but this writer could find no record of a tarpon being taken in Louisiana waters on either a fly rod or spinning tackle. The same is true of baitcasting gear.

That fine sport of tarpon on light tackle is reserved for certain other states, particularly Florida, and the Yucatan coast. The abundance of young tarpon in Florida's bays, inlets, lagoons and even drainage ditches make light tackle fishing for a baby silver king prime sport. Louisiana anglers are urged to stay with conventional tackle already described in this article. Tarpon strikes are too few and far between to even try what is a relatively common sport in Florida and a few other places.

Perhaps the combination of factors that make an increasingly large number of Louisiana anglers become tarpon fishermen can best be presented in a word picture. If the reader will let his thoughts wander for a few moments, here is what catching a tarpon is all about.

It's early morning and the sun hasn't risen. Folks are stirring aboard the small flotilla of fishing boats tied up in a bayou for the night. There are a half dozen different types of boats, all about the same size, but ranging from the relatively inexpensive to the somewhat more costly. Some are equipped with outriggers and all have one identical item—a fighting chair mounted in the center of the stern deck.

Tom Paugh

A hooked tarpon puts on an aerial show that is unequaled by any other game fish. Its mighty head thrashing, tail-walking jumps as it tries to shake the hook, coupled with dogged, powerful runs, test the skill of anglers and is always a tackle-testing session.

There's the muted sound of engines being started and one by one the boats ease from the spot where they have been moored in a companionable cluster and head out of the bayou into the Gulf. Once they reach open water, a few speed up and head for distant pre-determined places before they will begin trolling. Others move out slowly, spreading out over the water, with anglers paying out lines. Tarpon are where you find them and they might be close to shore. The bayou is located near a popular tarpon spot.

In the east there's an orange glow as the sun begins to rise, backlighting the billowy cumulus clouds that are drifting along high overhead. Daylight comes quickly in Louisiana. The water is green-gray but not dirty—typical of Louisiana's coastal waters. There's just enough breeze to give the water a little chop, making it an ideal day for trolling.

The CB radio begins to crackle with conversation. Tarpon fishermen are a companionable lot and they are quick to share the sighting of rolling tarpon or relay reports of strikes. If a tarpon is boated, the radio will crackle and virtually go wild with mingled voices. It resembles an eight-party line, if one can imagine what an eight-party line can sound like with everyone talking at the same time.

A school of rolling tarpon is sighted and several of the boats move toward it. One angler quickly grabs the radio and advises the other boats that tarpon have been sighted. The location is given. The radio continues to chatter away but the fishermen aboard the several boats pay little attention to it. They are moving in on the school of silver kings. The tarpon might not be feeding, but there's always the chance that somewhere in the playful school is a hungry silver king. Anglers are manning the rods, watching, and hoping.

The first pass through the school fails to bring a strike and the boats quickly circle and ease back into the school of tarpon. Down fairly deep and not rolling is a huge silver king. The husky tarpon that would tip a scale at around 140 pounds, or more, is cruising along. Its undershot lower jaws and body are gleaming in the light that does penetrate the near-green water. Its oversized eyes are bright, searching for food. It spots a large gleaming spoon skipping along the surface above. The spoon resembles a lone fat mullet. The tarpon swims swiftly upward and takes the spoon in a single gulp, hardly breaking the surface of the water.

Tarpon do not strike like bass. They take surface food in a gentle half-roll and then head downward to swallow the catch. The angler feels the movement of his lure stop. That and the light click of a loose drag paying out line is the only signal he has that a tarpon may be working the lure. There is a tendency for some boat operators to speed up a bit when an angler yells "strike." Most continue at the same trolling speed. This is a critical moment in fishing silver kings. The reel is snapped into full drag and the tarpon is struck. Often it is struck a second and a third time, assuring that the hook is sunk in bonelike cartilage.

The steel hook acts as a detonator that sets off a chain reaction of explosions, so quickly does the tarpon begin its fight. The silver king clears the water in a mighty jump, often 10 feet high and covering 20 feet or more. The huge mouth is open and the shaking head resembles a pendulum gone crazy as it whips from side to side trying to toss the lure.

After two or three jumps the fish changes tactics and starts a long run. The reel screams as line is peeled off. Then the fish sounds and the fight becomes a dogged battle. The angler pumps and sweats. The tarpon is well hooked and there's enough wire leader to keep the lashing tail from cutting the line.

How long the fight lasts is a matter of tackle strength, brute force of the fish, skillful handling of the rod by the angler, and artful maneuvering of the boat.

At last the fish begins to tire. The angler gains back line by raising his rod, dropping it quickly and reeling in the slack. Slowly the fish is worked toward the boat. Sight of the boat brings another leaping, dashing run, but the fish is weakened. It is turned partly on its side. Its movements are almost passive. If it is to be released, the fish is gaffed in the bottom of the lower jaw. If it is a rodeo entry, it is gaffed in the gills or body.

It is not a rodeo fish and the angler already has a beautiful big tarpon mounted. While the fish is on the gaff, docile and beaten, the angler reaches down and pulls loose one scale for a souvenir and for future luck. Tarpon scales are larger than those found on any other game fish, bigger than a silver dollar. That's the reason Cajun tarpon fishermen refer to silver kings as "grande ecaille."

The hook is twisted loose with long strong pliers. Engines have been stopped since the gaffing. The weary tarpon is turned rightside up and its mouth closes. Engines are started and the boat idles forward, deckhand and angler holding the fish upright. Its tail begins to fan gently, strength flowing back into the platinum-silver body. It moves slowly away from the boat. The anglers follow, watching the tarpon.

Suddenly, the fish senses that the frantic battle is over. It begins to swim. It moves faster as the boat approaches and then it gives a spurt of speed. The big tarpon is free to roam the gulf again, free to join a school of rolling, frolicking tarpon. Free, and once again a king of the coast.

Bob Dennie

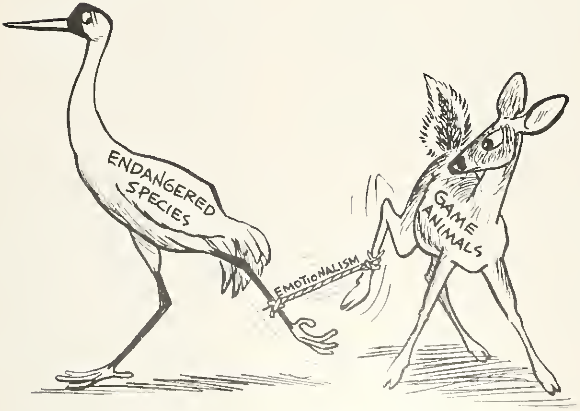
THE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT STORY...IN PERSPECTIVE

Reprinted Courtesy of The Wildlife Management Institute

Illustrations by Oscar Warbach

Writers and photographers have known for a long time that the plight of a wild animal struggling for survival makes a good story. Today, TV and illustrated magazines bring the problems of endangered species—sometimes with calculated shock effect—into the American home.

Much of this publicity has been constructive. It has aroused needed public support for efforts to save animals threatened with extinction at home and around the globe. Congress, as a result, has approved progressively stronger programs to aid wildlife species in difficulty. And the United States has taken leadership in developing a world treaty that commits all nations signing it to protect threatened and endangered animal populations.



The Need for Management

As with all emotion-tinged issues, however, there is tendency to overstate the case. Some journalists distort the status of American wildlife in general, the steps needed to maintain wild populations, and the actions required to reverse declines of species that really are threatened. Because of such misinformation many interested persons get the impression that *all* American wildlife is endangered. This view is unsupported by facts.

That man and his works have destroyed a number of species and greatly reduced others that were abundant in early times is well-known. Less well-known is the fact that many species, some of which were rare in colonial times, are thriving today largely because of compatible human influences on the environment, well designed private management efforts, and sound state and federal wildlife management programs.

All wildlife is affected in one way or another by man. But man can build as well as destroy. Of all of the creatures on earth, he is the only one with the ability to tailor the abundance of most species to fit his desires. With some birds and mammals this can be done with minimum effort because human changes in the environment favor their increase or their needs are not as critical. With others deliberate and often expensive programs must be developed to maintain specific habitats. Actions needed to save one species may be entirely different from those needed to save a second. But all wild animals require adequate habitat to sustain their populations and breeding stock from one year to the next.

Habitat—The Vital Element

Food, water, and cover used to escape enemies and adverse weather are the essential parts of the habitat of every species. But the specific habitat needs of each species vary in some degree from those of every other kind of animal, although many different animals may occupy the same general area.

The water requirements of a desert jackrabbit obviously differ greatly from those of a beaver. What might be year-round food and cover for a meadow mouse would be little more than a full day's meal and no cover at all for an elk. Many migratory birds occupy and need widely different types of seasonal habitats separated by hundreds and often many thousands of miles. Some large mammals, like caribou and cougars, range over wide areas to find their year-round needs. Small animals, like shrews and moles, may live out their lives in one small corner of a field or woodlot.

Some species need a highly specialized type of habitat. Most woodpeckers require dead and dying trees to supply their insect foods and nesting sites. But the Gila woodpecker of the desert Southwest digs its nesting holes exclusively in the larger cacti.

Some species, like the California condor, can stand almost no human disturbance. Others, like the common pigeon and English or house sparrow, thrive in the most populous cities, nesting on buildings and garnering meals from human handouts and leftovers.

When the habitat needs of every species and subspecies are computed in detail, the range in variety is almost infinite.

Whenever local conditions change, the species composition of the local wildlife populations also changes. Some species may be eliminated, others decline, and still others increase. If changes remove any of its essential habitat requirements, a species cannot continue to live in the area affected. If habitat of the kind it needs is reduced to remnants, the species will become endangered. If it is eliminated everywhere, the animals will become extinct. In the absence of adequate habitat, protection of individual animals is meaningless in terms of perpetuating wild populations.

Wildlife now threatened and endangered can be maintained only by protecting those populations that still exist and preserving what remains of their vital habitats. But their numbers can be increased by expanding and improving suitable habitats.

This does not mean that threatened and endangered wildlife can be saved only by denying or limiting human use of the land. Rather, it means that such use be done with thoughtful planning and with full consideration for wildlife's needs. Incorporation of such considerations in all programs affecting the landscape would assure a future for America's varied wildlife.

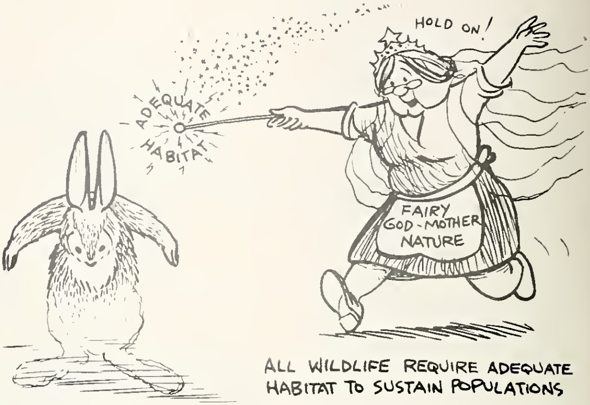
Habitat-Population Relationships

The potential for increase in wildlife populations in ideal habitat almost defies belief. In 1900, there were virtually no wild deer left in Pennsylvania. The state's original deer herd had been destroyed early in the 19th century by landclearing for agriculture, overgrazing, by destructive timber cutting followed by wild fire, and by unregulated shooting. After the Civil War, with increased industrialization and the opening of the West, thousands of farmers abandoned their marginal lands to move to towns, gold fields, or fertile soils beyond the Mississippi. Behind them, the forests, under protection from wild fire, gradually began to reoccupy abandoned fields and homesites, creating the early-growth forests favored by deer.

Around the turn of the century, sportsmen's organizations and the Pennsylvania Game Commission purchased a relatively few deer from other states and from private dealers, had laws passed to protect them, and released them into habitat that changing land use had made ideal for deer. Twenty-five years later, Penn's Woods held nearly a million whitetail, almost twice as many as the available range could support through winter.

Potentially, a deer population can more than double every second year. One doe can produce 15 or more fawns in an average life span of eight years. If all her young and theirs survive to the same age and breed as successfully, they would number 150 or more before her death. Many animals —songbirds, rabbits, squirrels, quail and ducks, for example—can increase at even greater rates.

Obviously, when a population of a particular species begins to multiply, something has to give—and it does.



ALL WILDLIFE REQUIRE ADEQUATE HABITAT TO SUSTAIN POPULATIONS

Each piece of land has a limit on the number of animals of any one species that it can support. Wildlife biologists call this carrying capacity. It is the capability of an area to provide a species wood, water, shelter, and other needs in a given season. Once carrying capacity is reached, the surplus animals must move elsewhere or die. If suitable under-stocked habitat is not available within their range of mobility, the surplus animals are doomed.

The tendency of populations of nearly all wild species is to expand rapidly to the carrying capacity of the available habitat. In some species, like pheasants and rabbits, which often produce ten or more young in a single breeding season, this level can be attained very quickly, even by a reduced breeding population. In other species, such as bears, which rarely breed until they are several years of age and then produce fewer young, the rate of increase is slower. But nature compensates by endowing the slower reproducers with longer lives.

For many species, particularly the smaller animals, nature's scheme is to produce an overabundance of young. This increases the likelihood that some will survive to perpetuate the species in spite of the inevitable toll taken by adverse weather, disease, starvation, predators, and other hazards. Most wild animals in North America produce all of their young during a restricted season of a few weeks, usually in the spring or early summer. In northern or temperate areas, summer carrying capacity is far higher than that of winter because of the abundance of plant and other life. A relatively small patch of cover may contain a population of a dozen or more cottontail rabbits in early September, but few are likely to survive until March. No more than 35 percent of the young mourning doves produced in summer live until the next breeding season. The higher the reproductive rate of a species, the higher its natural mortality rate. In the wild, animals that produce many young have short lives and lose most of their young in their first year.

Nature has many methods for regulating wild populations. One of these is *territorialism*—the tendency of breeding animals to defend a given area. Some sea birds nest almost shoulder to shoulder in dense colonies, but they will not tolerate the presence of other birds within reach of their nests. The lilting song of a male house wren is not a song of joy, but a warning to all other wrens to keep away from his nesting territory. If an intruder ventures too near, the defending male will attack with righteous fury. A cock pheasant may gather a harem of six or more mates and defend a crowing area approaching an acre or more. A male grizzly bear, in breeding season, may defend 20 or more square miles from all other males of his kind.

Such natural population controls are nature's way of assuring that only the stronger, quicker, and more alert animals of each species survive until breeding season and perpetuate the species.

At times, a series of mild winters and unusually favorable conditions over several breeding seasons may temporarily raise the normal carrying capacity and the populations of animals that depend on plants. When weather conditions return to average, crowding leads to stress and competition for food, space, and mates and permits the spread of diseases. Winter food supplies become inadequate and malnutrition, diseases, and predators that feed on the plant eaters are regulated by the abundance or scarcity of the animals on which they feed.

Overpopulations can be especially disastrous to large browsing and grazing mammals, like deer and elk. Where overabundant, such animals can cause great damage to their own habitats, resulting in a much reduced carrying capacity for many years. That is what happened to the Pennsylvania deer herd in the late 1920's. Hundreds of thousands of deer died of starvation and disease in a series of bitter winters before the numbers could be lowered by regulated hunting to the carrying capacity of the winter range.

Even in some wildlife refuges and national parks,elk and deer herds must be thinned to prevent overabundant animals from destroying their food supplies and damaging the food supplies of other species. The lesson here is that man and his activities have so interrupted wildlife's natural cycles and systems in most places that only through deliberate management can mankind assure the survival of most species of wildlife.

The Role of Protection

Protection plays an important part in wildlife management. The best habitats are of no value to wildlife if there are no breeders to occupy them. But to argue that total protection is the answer for all wildlife problems is a dangerous oversimplification. It ignores the differing needs of the various species.

With the exception of a few species considered pests in certain situations, nearly all birds and mammals receive some degree of legal protection. Songbirds, eagles, hawks, egrets, and many other types of birds are granted continuing protection under state and federal laws. Most states provide full legal protection for endangered species found within their borders. At the federal level, the endangered species programs and the new world treaty governing trade in threatened and endangered species provide additional protection for our less common forms of wildlife. Violators of these laws risk heavy penalties in state and federal courts.

But the degree of protection needed by the different species varies as widely as their habitat requirements. The loss of only a few individuals of an endangered species like the whooping crane or California condor would be critical. On the other hand, the coyote, in spite of persecution since early times, thrives in the face of adversity. It remains common on most of the western prairies and has extended its original range into the South and East.

Animals classed as game under state and federal laws may be hunted, but they are not without protection. They may be taken by hunters only under regulations that prescribe calendar dates, hunting hours, bag limits, and methods of taking. Under certain circumstances, hunting seasons for some game species may be closed completely. All game species are protected by law while they are nesting and raising their young. These regulations, based on careful research, are designed to assure the carry-over to the next breeding season of enough animals to repopulate the available habitat.

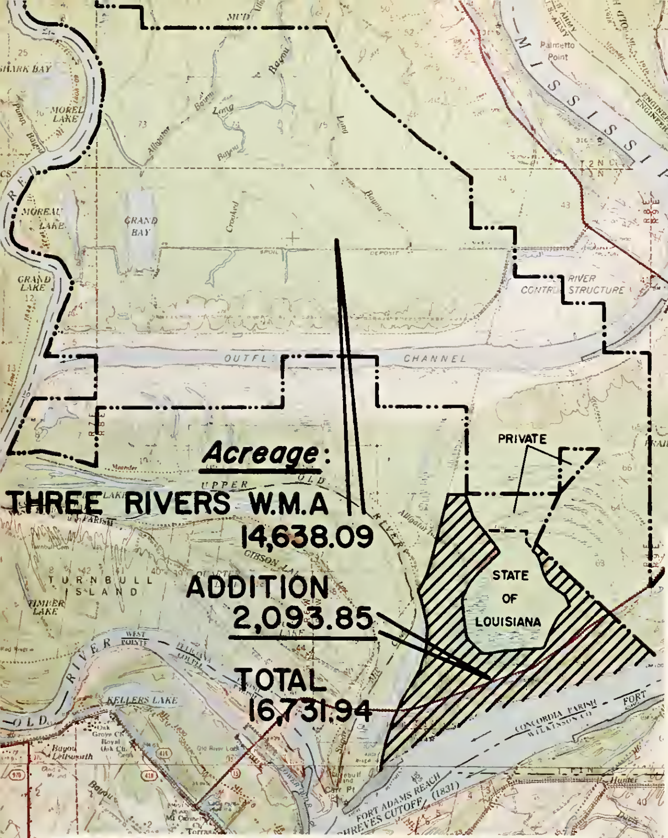
There are situations under which it may be necessary to reduce temporarily the population of one species to benefit another. Although gulls are protected by state and federal laws, legal protection of herring gulls nesting on islands off the Massachusetts coast was suspended for a while to permit the poisoning of some birds and destroying the eggs of others. The reason—the breeding gull population had mushroomed because of the presence of nearby mainland garbage dumps, and the abundant gulls were eating the eggs and young of the much rarer terns that formerly had the islands nearly to themselves.

In order to reestablish a species in suitable unoccupied habitat, it may be necessary to temporarily reduce the numbers of predators in the area until the released animals multiply and become familiar with their new surroundings. After prey species increase above the threshold level, predators are just one of the many factors bearing on the population's survival.

Predation is not all bad, in fact. By falling victim to a fox or an owl, for example, the prey helps perpetuate a higher and equally valued order of life.

Next Issue:
The Game Management Story
Part Two

Purchase Enlarges Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area



The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission continued to accelerate its land acquisition program May 21, purchasing an additional 2,093 acres adjoining the Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area in lower Concordia Parish.

The Act of Sale took place in Governor Edwin Edwards' office. Purchase of the additional acreage now brings the management area to 16,731 acres. Total acreage in wildlife management areas owned by the commission has now reached 205,932.

The additional tract consists primarily of bottomland hardwoods offering excellent habitat for deer, squirrel, swamp rabbit, woodcock, and waterfowl. Other forms of wildlife found on the area include nutria, beaver, mink, otter, raccoon, opossum, bobcat, and fox.

Governor Edwin Edwards, seated, signs the Act of Sale for the latest addition to Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area. Shown from left are H. Clay Luttrell, commission chairman; Donald Wille, commission member; Verdie R. Perkins, representing the landowners; commission members Jean Lapeyre and Jimmie Thompson; and J. Burton Angelle, commission director.

LAKE CONCORDIA

Concordia Parish

ARTHUR M. WILLIAMS
Fisheries Biologist

Lake Concordia is a 1,000-acre Mississippi River oxbow lake located near Ferriday, Louisiana. This is a typical oxbow that has been cut off from backwater it once received from the Mississippi River. Largemouth bass, bluegill, and redear sunfish populations are relatively high. Crappie are almost non-existent due to stabilization of the water level.

Lake Concordia produces some of the earliest bass fishing in the state. A dense growth of coontail near the shoreline makes bass fishing difficult, but not impossible. Bass are taken early in the year on jigs and underwater lures just before nest selection starts. These are generally fished along the outside edge of the coontail and cypress trees. As water temperatures rise, fish move in near the shore. Best bait at this time is an expertly thrown top-water lure or a plastic worm with no lead. Care must be taken not to get close to the fish, because water is clear and shallow and the foraging fish will spook easily. Best days are overcast with a slight drizzling rain.

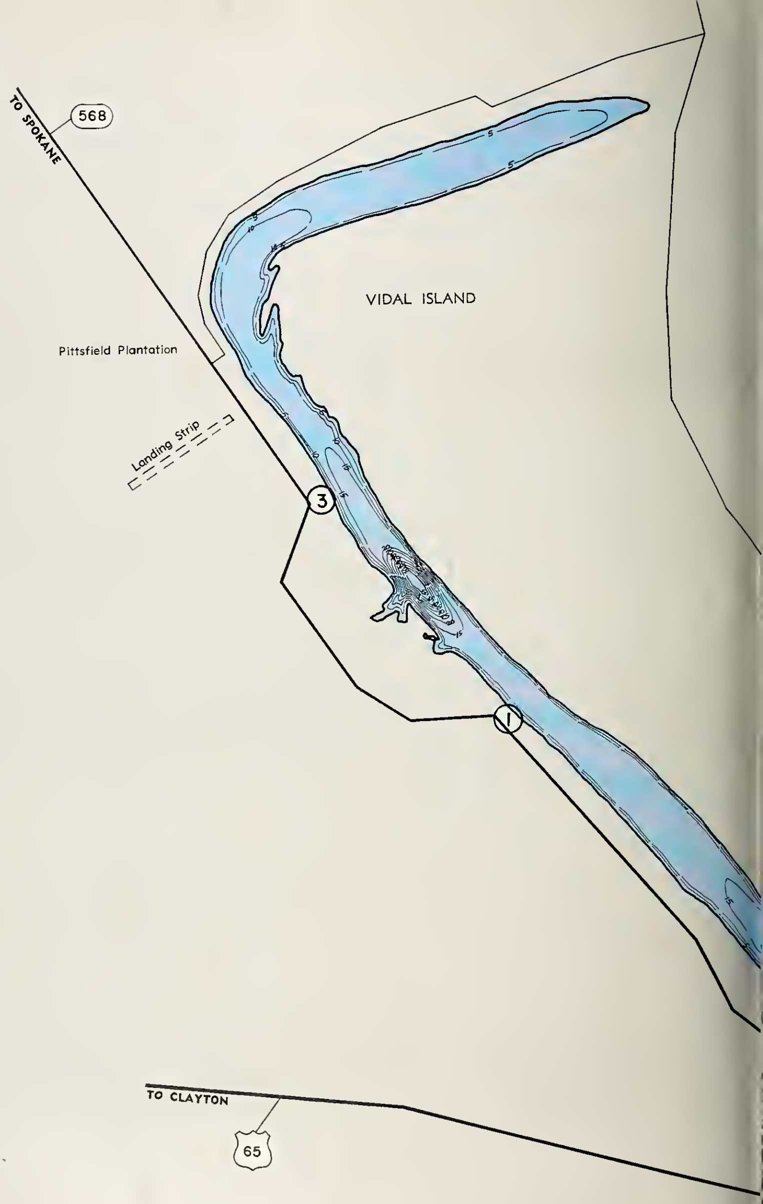
It is generally a good idea to keep an eye peeled along the shore and in front of you for that tell-tale swirl. This indicates nesting bass and this spot should be tried. If nothing happens on the first trip, move on, but remember the location. There is a bass there and he may have to be tried three or four times before he will hit. During sunny, clear weather, fishing is best early and late in the day. Bass can be caught after the spawning season using underwater lures around piers or cypress trees. Earlier in the year bass may be caught at daylight while they are feeding on spawning threadfin shad. Threadfin spawn around vegetation which hangs in the water. At almost any green cypress limb in the water, there may be bass feeding on shad. A topwater lure is the most productive bait here.

Bass and bream fishing are fair to good during most of the year, but best catches are made during the spawn. Bream fishing is best using worms or small crawfish in nesting sites. Bream run smaller due to overcrowded conditions, but there are plenty to be had. If the water level is high because of local rains, bream and bass may spawn behind the timber. They can be caught by wading anglers.

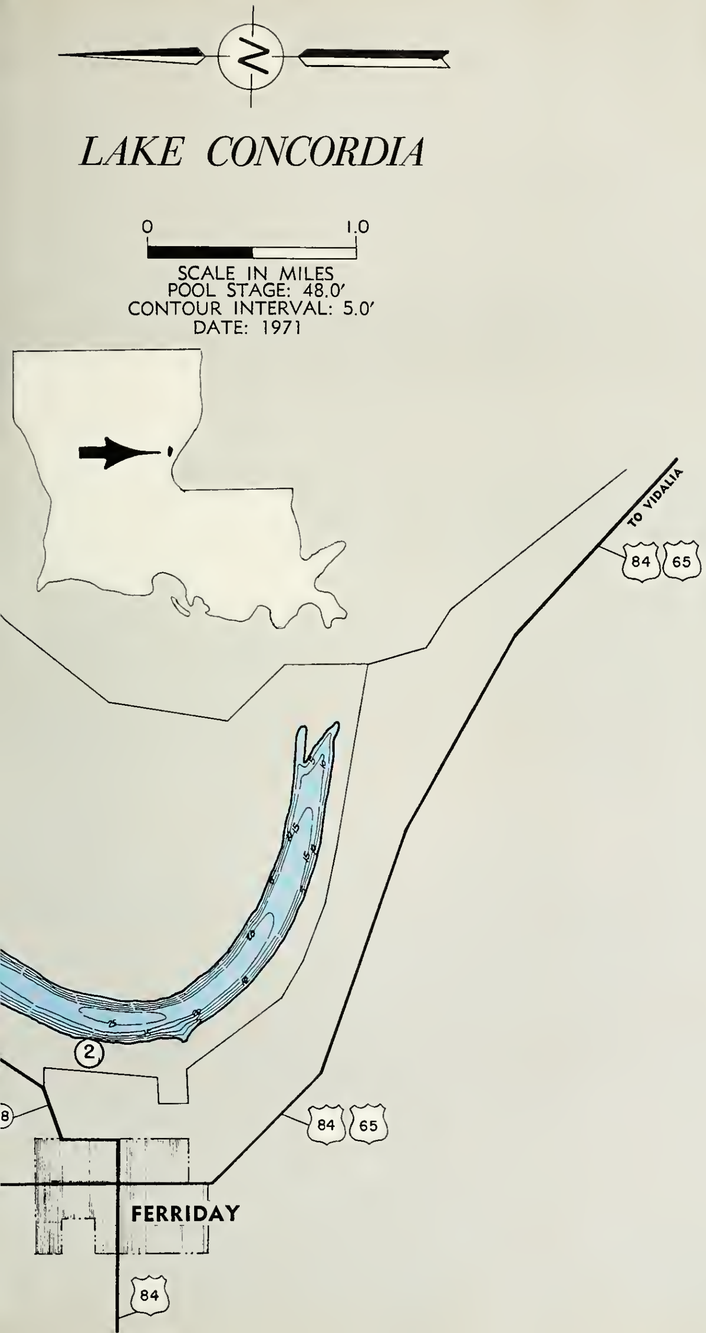
Lake Concordia is good for swimming and skiing during the warmer months. There are some submerged stumps at both ends of the lake, so outboard motors should be operated with care. The open part of the lake, however, is free of obstructions and is safe for running speed boats. Lake users, nevertheless, should always be on the alert for skiers and swimmers.

LAKE CONCORDIA FACILITIES DATA

NDING	Boat Launching	Launching Fee	Rental Boats	Boat Storage	Rental Motors	Fuel	Oil	Bait	Guide Service	Refreshments	Rest Rooms	Playgrounds	Ice	Drinking Water	Water	Electricity	Shelters	Tables	Grills	Firewood	Trash Cans	Camping Area	Trailer Space	Cabins
1. Tullos' Camp	X	X	X											X	X								X	
2. Sportsmen's Lodge	X	X	X		X			X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X						
3. Public Boat Launching Ramp	X																							


TO SPOKANE
568
VIDAL ISLAND
Pittsfield Plantation
Landing Strip
3
1
TO CLAYTON
65
5
10
15

LAKE CONCORDIA

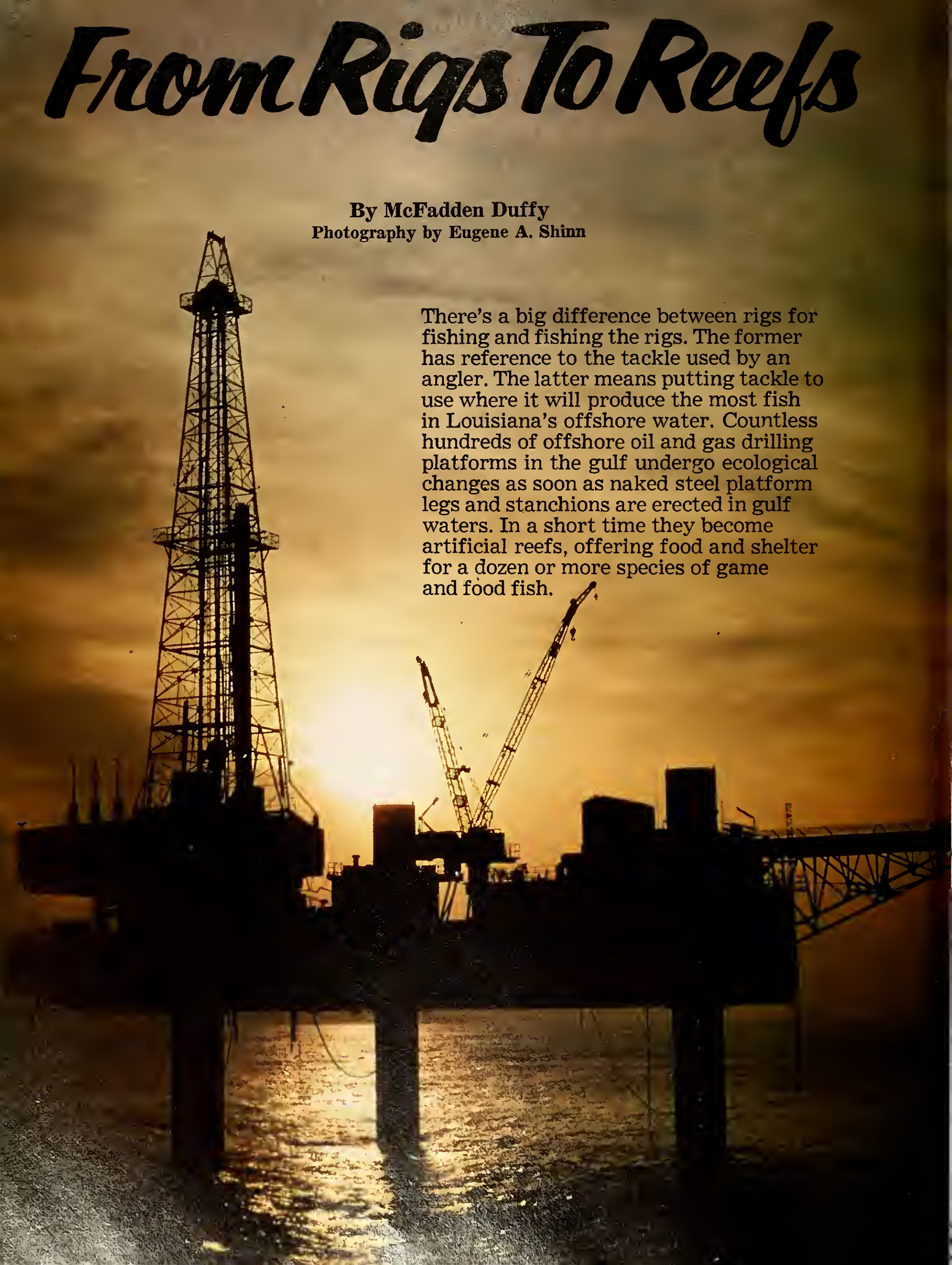


SCALE IN MILES
POOL STAGE: 48.0′
CONTOUR INTERVAL: 5.0′
DATE: 1971

From Rigs To Reefs

By McFadden Duffy
Photography by Eugene A. Shinn

There's a big difference between rigs for fishing and fishing the rigs. The former has reference to the tackle used by an angler. The latter means putting tackle to use where it will produce the most fish in Louisiana's offshore water. Countless hundreds of offshore oil and gas drilling platforms in the gulf undergo ecological changes as soon as naked steel platform legs and stanchions are erected in gulf waters. In a short time they become artificial reefs, offering food and shelter for a dozen or more species of game and food fish.



In Louisiana today, "fishing the rigs" is a common expression, and to coastal anglers seeking saltwater fish it means a fishing trip to any of hundreds of oil and gas drilling and production platforms, or the huge offshore sulphur mine within sight of Grand Isle on a clear day.

What sort of fishing do these anglers enjoy when they tie their boats to one of the surface-level stanchions and allow it to drift away 10 to 20 feet from an offshore platform, positioned by the current or the wind?

The catch depends upon the season of the year, but rig fishing is a year around sport in the Gulf of Mexico, so there is always good angling around the offshore platforms, weather permitting.

For many months of the year, fishermen may be hauling up brick-red snappers or occasionally boating their kissing cousins, the red-tinged mangrove snappers. Then, perhaps, they may be battling slashing king mackerel, reeling in spotted Spanish mackerel, white or spotted sea trout (weakfish, locally called white trout or speckled trout), spadefish, toothy barracuda, cagey sheepshead, curiously shaped lookdowns, hefty amberjack, weighty grouper, hungry bluefish, shoreward prowling redfish, or any of another half-dozen species.

In the late fall and winter months, pompano are the most highly prized fish caught around the platforms. Deftly catching those cautious nibblers on light tackle calls for skill and a sensitive touch. These platinum and gold game and food fish provide even persons with modest pocketbooks a gourmet treat, for of all fish pompano command a higher price in the market than prime beef.

What causes offshore platforms to quickly change into artificial reefs, attracting and collecting many species of fish? Marine biologists might answer that placing any permanent structure in gulf waters signals the start of an ecosystem that eventually means

The first ecological change that begins taking place when an offshore platform is erected in the gulf is the collection of algae, the basis of all life in the seas and gulfs of the world. An underwater diver inspects the rapid formation of algae on a steel stanchion.

An underwater biologist feeds algae to a spadefish. It is this basic marine food that forms on the steel stanchions that criss-cross the large supporting legs of offshore petroleum platforms. It later develops a food chain that concentrates many species of fish.

Schools of spadefish, such as these, are quick to take up residence under offshore petroleum platforms. In turn, they attract larger fish, and these draw even larger fish. Jewfish in the 500 pound range are probably the largest species inhabiting platforms in the gulf.

fish. This simple statement needs a fuller explanation.

Wherever the rigs, platforms, producing structures (all lumped together and referred to as rigs), and pipeline centers are found, there are ecological changes that take place. Contrary to some beliefs, they are not harmful changes, as fisheries statistics for Louisiana and other northern gulf states readily reveal.

Approximately 28 years ago Louisiana took a gamble and won, as far as fishermen are concerned. The vast oil and gas production off the Louisiana coast has proved that oil and water do mix—not in the laboratory sense, but in practicality. Any look at federal fisheries statistics will show this to be true. As oil and gas development took place in the gulf, fisheries products increased.

The increase may be partly due to the fact that individuals in coastal fisheries have increased numerically, as have petroleum and gas activities, but the fact remains that observation for over a quarter of a century has proved that the rigs do produce fish.

More properly, it should be said that the rigs collect fish and concentrate them, making them more readily available to anglers. The welded steel stanchions that criss-cross the huge structures underwater soon begin to collect algae, which are basically primitive chlorophyll-bearing plants that start a food chain cycle. The algae attract little bait fish, which in turn attract bigger fish, and then even bigger fish. In short, the offshore platforms that fishermen call rigs become artificial reefs offering housing to varieties of fish that probably have been present in the Gulf of Mexico for centuries but have never felt the sting of a baited hook or the steel shaft from a spearfisherman's gun.

The barracuda is a good example of new fish species being attracted as oil exploration and production platforms move ever outward from shore, not unlike a horde of mighty steel spiders. Early records kept by the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association showed no entries by rod and reel fishermen in the barracuda category until an angler named John Dofter entered a 37 pound, eight ounce 'cuda in 1965. It was tied four months later by a barracuda caught by Richard Glynn. Today, the top barracuda is a 50 pounder, caught by A. C. Mills in August 1970. These were all rig fish, as are the additional seven which make up the "Top Ten" in the species. Anglers are now jockeying for position each year in the "Top Ten."

Logically, there is only one thing that caused barracuda to take up summer residence around the base of the offshore platforms . . . the food chain ecosystem developed by the rigs. It should be added that approximately 2,000 barracuda have been speared by underwater divers in fishing competition in the skindiving divisions of the many Louisiana fishing contests each summer during the past decade or more.

To more thoroughly explain how offshore platforms serve to attract and sustain various species of fish it should be pointed out that worldwide much of the sea and sea floor is nearly lacking in plant and animal life. Usually sea bottoms, composed of sand or mud, support a limited, specialized group of species. Abundant life flourishes in only the top 60 feet of water, primarily on the perimeters of the oceans.

The gulf floor off Louisiana also consists of thousands of square miles of Mississippi River-derived clay and sand, a virtual flat, underwater plain populated by tremendous quantities of

Barracuda, too, began taking up summer quarters under the rigs over a decade ago. Prior to 1965 none were taken on rod and reel. After that year, catching 'cudas on rod and reel became common, and the tiger of the sea shows up frequently in catches made near petroleum platforms.

Most coastal fishing contests include a division for spearfishermen. Here an underwater diver rests after spearing a red snapper that possibly may win a trophy for first, second, or third place in a fishing rodeo.

crab and shrimp. Other than flounder and saltwater catfish, few fish are found on such a bottom. The species caught under the offshore platforms are rarely taken on this flat, muddy expanse.

In this underwater desert, areas with dimension such as reefs that are natural or man-made attract fish. This is because they provide a permanent habitat for numerous plants and animal species, resulting in a biological community of extreme complexity.

All artificial reefs attract fish for a variety of reasons, the primary one being food. Algae, the basis of all life in the oceans, grows profusely on hard surfaces such as rock, steel, or concrete. This is fed upon directly by small crustaceans and browsing fishes, which in turn are fed upon by larger fishes. Since algae do not thrive on muddy or shifting sand bottoms, their growth in the gulf is almost entirely limited to the surfaces provided by oil platforms. Also, barnacles, bryozoa, corals, tunicates, hydrozoans, mollusks, and worms that thrive on platforms are a food source not available to fish on the surrounding mud bottom.

An additional important factor is water depth. Algae require sunlight to grow, and therefore the amount of algae growth is greatest near the surface. The platforms, by virtue of reaching from the muddy bottom to the surface, allow for algae growth and many other organisms, such as barnacles, at their most favorable depths in areas where they could not exist in quantity under normal conditions.

Besides food for fish, petroleum platforms provide hiding places. Protection from predators is especially important to the young of many species. Of great importance, is the fact that fish are drawn to solid objects. This has been demonstrated by the way tripletail and cobia hang out around buoys, floating planks, or crates. This attraction to fixed objects is also true of small bait fishes.

This large king mackerel lurking near the corner of the rig in the background put up a terrific fight. Schools of kings linger around the platforms for months. Because of their fine fighting qualities, they are eagerly sought by coastal anglers.

In brief, this is the manner in which offshore petroleum rigs bring about ecological changes that convert them to artificial reefs, attracting and concentrating fish of many species throughout the seasons. It is the reason why offshore fishing in Louisiana waters around the hundreds of platforms is a bonanza for sportfishermen.

"Fishing the rigs" may be a strange expression to anglers from other states, but it has been on the tongues of Bayou State anglers for more than a quarter of a century. And this type of fishing is getting better every year.

h dreds of offshore drilling and production platforms provide thousands of
o tal anglers with unexcelled fishing. The catches may vary with season, but
h ish boated range the gamut from king mackerel to hefty amberjack. More
h a dozen species of fish are commonly taken while fishing the rigs.

Young anglers are introduced to good fishing around the offshore platforms. The red snappers were biting this day. On other days, the haul might include cobia, Spanish mackerel, bluefish, lookdown, spadefish, or any of well over a dozen species.

WOODEN DECOYS ARE MAKING A COMEBACK

By McFadden Duffy

Photography by Lloyd Poissenot

Summer's brassy suns and blistering days always mean saltwater fishing in Louisiana's belt of coastal parishes. Anglers from all over the state, particularly those below U.S. Highway 190, are busy following the fishing rodeo circuit. They're competing for gleaming silver trophies in at least two dozen fishing tournaments, including about five coastal classics. In their ranks are waterfowlers whose summer activities are generally devoted to saltwater fishing.

This summer an increasingly large number of duck hunters will sandwich in decoy carving with their other activities. The reason for this is that decoy carving, an art that almost vanished with the advent of lightweight rubber, fibre, and plastic decoys following Word War II, is in a spiraling revival stage. A new era in basic craftsmanship is being ushered in. Present indications are that more duck hunters will try their hands at making their own decoys in the immediate years ahead.

For an answer to this sudden interest in an ancient art, one that flourished in Louisiana for nearly a century and then began to fade away only to be rekindled, we interviewed Charles W. Frank, Jr. Frank is one of the state's outstanding carvers of decorative decoys, shore, and wading birds, and an authority on decoys and decoy carving.

"Let's face facts," Charles Frank said. "There's more interest in decoy collecting and carving today than at any time in history. Old wooden decoys are becoming more and more difficult to find than ever before. They are now recognized as a definitive art form that has been almost totally neglected until recent years.

"Additionally," he added, "the days of big bag limits are gone. I don't think we'll ever see larger bag limits than those we have at the present time. I hope they don't become more restrictive. That would be detrimental to the work of Ducks Unlimited, private landowners, and the efforts of duck hunters to enhance their leases. On the other hand, it is doubtful that we will ever see any great liberalization of bag limits."

First step in decoy making is shaping the body from a well cured block of wood. Power tools are a great help, but some of the state's outstanding decoys were shaped with an axe and regular pocket knife. Patterns are helpful and can be drawn from other decoys. They are particularly useful in cutting blocks with power saws.

Carving tools or even a pocket knife can be used for shaping feather details for more life-like decoys. This work is a must in making decorative models. Work decoys with plain, properly shaped bodies are excellent to shoot over.

Electric burning tool is a quick way to etch in feather details, although the same results can be painstakingly achieved by decoy carvers who use only a sharp blade.

When questioned about the growing interest on the part of waterfowlers to make their own decoys, Frank replied quickly and sincerely.

"That's not difficult to answer," he said. "Aside from the pleasure derived in enhancing a leased pond or lagoon to attract and hold waterfowl, and the keen anticipation of duck hunting itself as the season approaches, there's another satisfaction just now being fully appreciated. What greater thrill can any duck hunter have than seeing ducks circle overhead and then cup their wings and settle down into a spread of decoys that he made himself? It is a personal thrill that can't be put into words. It has to be realized. That's why one sees this increase in decoy making on the part of hunters."

As this writer talked with Charles Frank, the man moved casually about his workshop—roughing out the body of a decoy from a block of seasoned wood, using an electric sander to both smooth and more delicately shape the head of a decoy, deftly etching feathers on another decoy with a burning tool, and touching up a painted decoy that was nearly completed.

"You've built up a fine shop here," I commented, "but what I'd like to

Power sanders help, but they are not necessary for the average waterfowler who wants to make his own decoys. Sandpaper and elbow grease will accomplish the same thing. It only takes longer.

have are some tips for fellows who might want to carve their own decoys but do not have all of the tools and accessories you have. How about some basic advice for potential carvers?"

"Sure, this is fine" he said, "but look around at the collection. Many of my most prized decoys from early Louisiana carvers were shaped with a hatchet and pocket knife. An elaborate shop and power tools allows me to work faster to obtain the results I want. Any person who wants to carve decoys can do well with some basic, inexpensive tools. It will take time, but he'll progress faster as he gets better at the art."

The basic tools he mentioned included a coping saw, or access to a band saw, for shaping the rough blocks into decoy form. Additionally, he mentioned a rasp, a spoke-shave, a draw knife, a hatchet, and a sharp pocket knife.

When questioned about the proper wood to use, Charles Frank told me that anyone living near the river could find plenty of wood. There are cypress logs and stumps, and cottonwood logs. These can be cut into blocks. They should be allowed to dry for a month or two. These two woods are easy to carve and surface seal before painting so that they will be waterproof. There are two methods of wood sealing: one is a bath in hot linseed oil. This should be allowed to soak in and dry before the decoy is painted. The other method would be two coats of sanding sealer. These should be allowed to dry for about 24 hours after each coat, and buffed with steel wool after each application of the sealer.

When I asked about the cutting of the original block, it brought up the matter of design and patterns. Frank said that every new carver should select a decoy that he likes and make four patterns. Two should be side view patterns, one of the head and the second of the body. Then the

The electric burning tool is essential in putting final touches to decoy heads. This head will go on a decorative block and probably never be shot over. Waterfowlers in the marsh do not need such detail.

carver should make two patterns showing the top of the head and the top of the decoy body.

"These will serve as guides," he said, "but the finished product will not be a perfect replica of the basic decoy from which the patterns were made. In fact, two new carvers could use the same original for their patterns and they'll end up with different characteristics. It has always been that way. Even with the early decoy carvers, each had certain characteristics that made his work as individual as a human fingerprint. It has taken me years, but I can glance at almost any old decoy and tell who carved it.

"It is also easy to tell when someone in the same area has imitated the carving of another individual. The finished decoys may look somewhat similar. The painting may be similar to a degree, but the decoys are different. It has taken me years to develop this ability, but no two carvers will produce identical decoys. There'll be something that sets them apart."

I steered the subject back to proper woods for beginners to use. There are many people who do not have ready access to the river banks for drift logs.

"The next best bet would be light cedar blocks from a lumber yard, or possibly balsa wood from a surplus life raft. I have some excellent decoys in my collection that were carved from old or abandoned life rafts. Both cedar and balsa are easy to carve and seal well for waterproofing before painting."

Then I fired a loaded question at Charles Frank. What waterfowl should the beginner start with? He looked at me intently and didn't hesitate.

"They should start with a dozen or two coots—poule d'eau. They are easy to carve and easy to paint. I'd recommend coots. Most ducks will decoy into a raft of coots. Two dozen would be a fine start. Later, for marsh hunting, I'd say make a dozen mallards. If a hunter is going to use his decoys in diving duck waters, then I would say make a dozen ring-neck ducks. They are easy to paint, and a spread of ring-neck decoys will attract other diving ducks."

I continued to press him for an in depth explanation as to why so many duck hunters were becoming interested in making their own decoys.

"It's a trend in Louisiana that simmered for a couple of years and flamed up. About five months ago, the Louisiana Woodcarver's Association was formed. There's a meeting each month and I'd say there are never less than 70-odd members at each meeting. We discuss various techniques in carving—everything from curing wood to paints that will produce the best results. The enthusiasm is so great that they just want to sit and talk for hours."

He added an impressive note. There are more decoy carvers in the Lafourche Parish area today than there were back in the heyday of decoy carving. Many of them are young carvers and they are turning out some fine work. It's just a creative trend that has taken over. But it shows no sign of slowing down.

I looked at a beautiful teal Frank had carved. It was not a decoy but a wood carving for decorative purposes only. It hung by a leather thong about its feet, head down and wings spread. It was so realistic that one would have thought it to be a mounted duck. He seemed to read my mind.

"One thing to remember," he said, "is this. There's a big difference between 'work decoys' and decorative carvings. Anyone with some simple tools can make decoys that will attract ducks. And, there's no greater thrill than seeing ducks settling into your own decoys. It adds to the total dimension of waterfowling."

For nearly a quarter century Charles Frank has been fascinated by the artful work of Louisiana's decoy carvers, work that rates as high as the craftsmanship of the decoys carvers of the eastern states and upper Mississippi Valley. For years he toured the bayou country seeking out Louisiana's outstanding decoy carvers and collecting some of their decoys. His personal collection is probably the finest in Louisiana and Frank is an authority on Louisiana decoys and decoy carvers, both antique and contemporary.

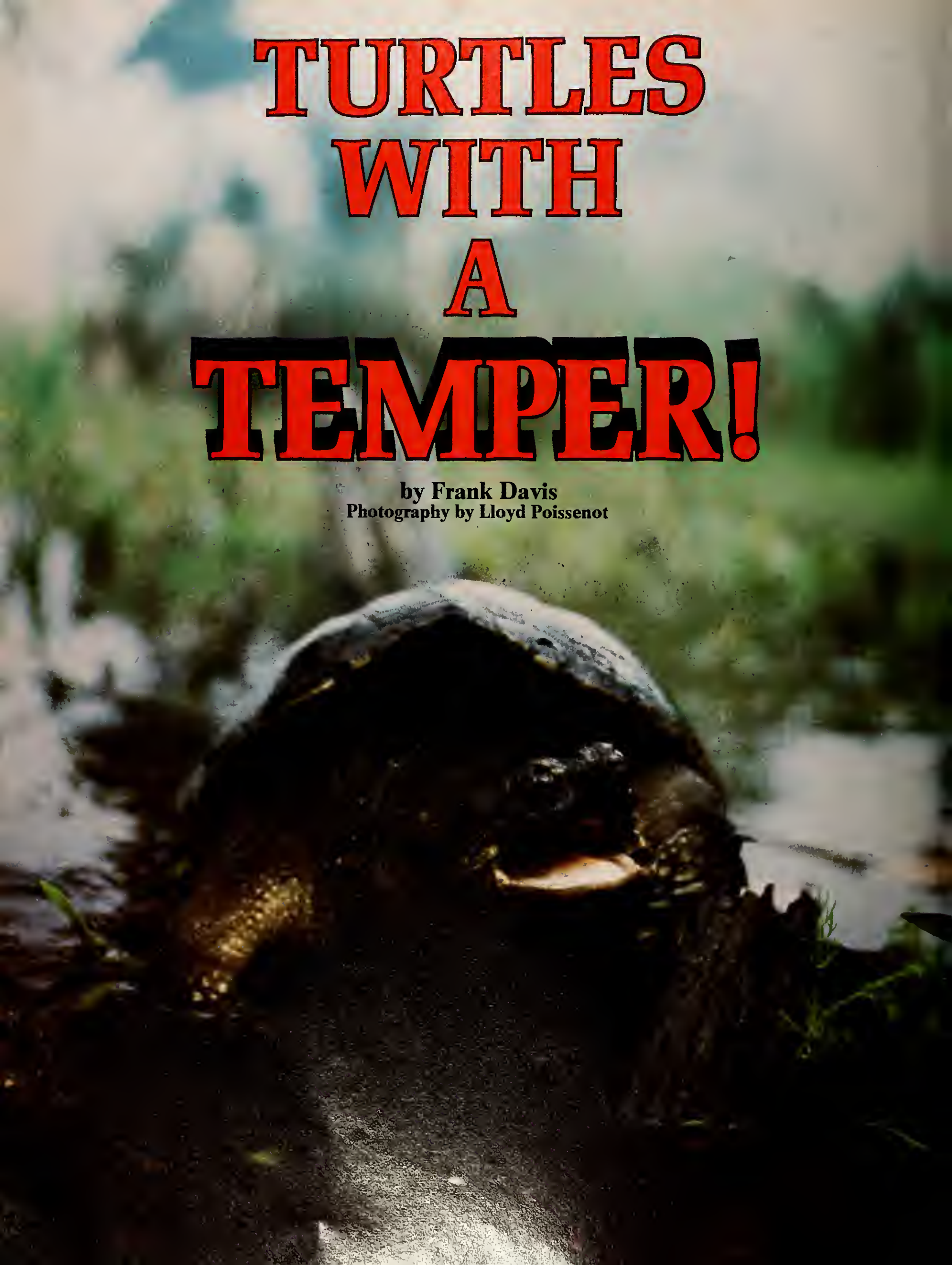
He is an outstanding decoy carver himself, specializing in decorative decoys and both shore and wading birds. His camera has recorded many of the early carvers and their decoys. Some of the carvers he interviewed for his book are now deceased. Others are aged but still producing definitive Louisiana decoys.

Louisiana Duck Decoys by Charles W. Frank, Jr., is the only book ever written about Louisiana decoy carvers. It is 8 x 11 inches in size and its 124 pages contain 258 full color photographs. It is available in all book stores and from Adler's Art Gallery, 722 Canal Street, New Orleans. Price is $10 Plus Tax.

TURTLES WITH A TEMPER!

by Frank Davis

Photography by Lloyd Poissenot



TURTLES ARE REPTILES which can be traced back to the Jurassic Period of the Mesozoic Era—about 180,000,000 years ago—when in geologic time only dinosaurs and other reptilian forms inhabited the earth. Yet, these hardy creatures perservered through the centuries, withstanding the ravages and onslaughts of nature and the convulsions and seizures of the earth.

Of all the species in existence, the "snapping turtles," ancestors of the prehistoric reptiles, universally create the greatest amount of interest. Unlike their passive relatives who retreat to the hidden safety of an armored shell, the "snappers," as their name implies, are active, aggressive, temperamental, and vicious...and they look it! They fear no threat. They face it head-on, with jaws agape, keen eyes focused, and muscles tensed! And at the moment of peak annoyance, in a spirit ready to fight the world, they thrust forward at the confrontation, snapping powerful jaws together with force enough to sever a man's hand!

Louisiana has two species of snapper turtle—the common snapper and the alligator snapper. The former, most herpetologists say, dates back to approximately 15,000,000 years ago, while the latter goes back even further, an estimated 30,000,000 years ago. Scientifically, they are two distinct species, but relationship is believed to be the offshoot of an evolutionary common ancestor somewhere in the kinship chain.

Both the common and the alligator snapper make impressions on man...as delicate tablefare. There was a time when the succulent snapper meat could be purchased for ten cents per pound, but today that price usually has a $3 figure tacked ahead of it. Some Louisiana scientists believe the reason for increased pricing, possibly, is that the two species may be in decline. No quantitative data supports such suspicions, however. Louisiana fishermen, on the other hand insist the species are declining in numbers. Both groups blame changing environment, loss of habitat, industrial pollution, and a host of other factors for the wane.

The question to be asked, then, is..."Can a 20th Century environ wreak havoc of any appreciable extent on a species that was strong enough to leave its prehistoric reptilian counterparts behind?" Herpetologists remark that the turtle is a conservative creature with a good body plan and good protection. It demands very little, is not so choosy about its dietary requirements, can live a long time without food and oxygen, and just plain has the equipment it takes to live through the stresses applied by nature.

But if that is the case..."Do the stresses of man surpass the stresses of Mother Nature?"

The common snapping turtle is a freshwater species that ranges from the southern part of Canada to Nova Scotia to the United States. It can be found in slow-running streams, muddy rivers, ponds, lagoons, swamps, and marshes. Common snappers usually stalk their prey, capture it, and bring it underwater to eat. Diet includes small invertebrates, fishes, reptiles, birds, mammals, carrion, and a large amount of vegetation.

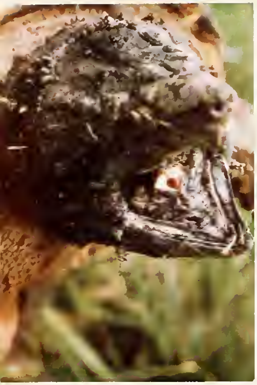
The female of the species lays her eggs during summer. After finding an ideal spot, sometimes a great distance from water, the turtle digs out a hole in the mud, crawls into it, and deposits her eggs. She then makes her way back to the water, leaving the tiny, white, round eggs to hatch in the heat of the sun. Usual deposit contains about two dozen eggs. Large specimens of the common snapper can reach a weight of 40 pounds.

The alligator snapper, also referred to as the loggerhead because of the appearance of its head and neck, is the oldest form of snapper known. These are the raw brutes of the snapper family, and the viciousness of the bite of these hooked-mouth creatures far surpasses the abbreviated, but serious, bite of the common snapper.

The loggerhead can reach weights up to 150 pounds.

Unlike the common snapper, the loggerhead rarely goes far from water to lay its eggs—usually 20 to 40 at a time. Like the common snapper, she digs out a hole with her back legs, deposits the eggs in the mud, and covers them to return to the water. Loggerheads can be identified and distinguished from common snappers by the sharp point of the snout and three rows of keels on the upper shell. Common snappers usually have a smooth shell and a more rounded snout.

The alligator snapper diets on fish, snakes, amphibians, and even waterfowl.



At the bottom of the loggerhead's mouth, a small appendage that looks like two tiny grubs is activated when the large turtle is ready to feed. The creature is capable of keeping the grub-like tissue moving for hours at a time. After enticing prey to the appendage, the razor-sharp beaked jaws neatly bite into supper!

Left, a loggerhead, lifeless as a rock, whiles away its non-feeding hours. Only the tip of the reptile's nose protrudes above the surface so it can breathe. Above, common snappers have been known to utilize cultivated fields for hatcheries. Although eggs may be deposited in the "bed" in late summer, they may not hatch out until the following spring. Hatchlings head immediately for water.

Above, turtle eggs, perfectly round, white, and thin-shelled, are about the size of ping-pong balls. While adult turtles have relatively few predators, the eggs quite frequently become tidbits for snacking raccoons, skunks, opossums, and armadillos. Left, Fishing pressure on the loggerhead is not so great as pressure on the common snapper because "poling" (probing the bottom of a pond or lagoon with a long pole to feel for the turtles) is the method by which most alligator snappers are harvested.

It doesn't do any good to pole just any old place. To be able to harvest loggerheads consistently, it is essential the fisherman know the spot and know that alligator snappers inhabit certain areas within the area. Pure luck amounts to about one-tenth of one percent when one is looking for loggerheads.

Real fishing pressure is exerted on the common snapper, the species most often taken by "trotlining." From one single line, a series of second lines and baited hooks is dropped to the bottom. Because the common snapper forages for its food (not lures it as the loggerhead does), the small turtles commonly swallow the baited hooks and are caught on the trotline. Then when the commercial fisherman runs his lines, the turtle is boated and rushed off to market.

And it is all part of supply-and-demand. In a society where snapper meat is a delicacy, the over-the-counter sale and purchase of turtle meat for soups and stews becomes the end product of a unique Louisiana fishery resource.

PIE'S POTPOURRI

By Marian "Pie" Pendley

Summertime . . . and the living is easy. What better way to spend a pleasant afternoon than to take the family crabbing. Everyone will share in a family activity and the end result, hopefully, will be a delicious meal.

If you ask a Louisianian his favorite recipe for cooking crabs it is like quoting Elizabeth Barrett Browning from her "Sonnets of the Portuguese" when she wrote, "How Do I Love Thee, Let Me Count the Ways."

First, I like them boiled. then I like them marinated. then I like stuffed mushrooms with crabmeat, then I like a crabmeat casserole and so on. We have submitted some of our favorite recipes for your consideration and perhaps you will add them to your recipe file.

BOILED CRABS

For every dozen crabs this is a good rule of thumb to follow: Pour about 6 inches of water in pot and let it come to a boil. Add:

1 cup salt
2 tbsp. red pepper
1 chopped onion
1 cut up lemon
1 small head garlic

Cover pot and let boil for 20 minutes. Add crabs. After water comes back to a boil, cook for 8 minutes. Drain and eat. You should have a fire that gives enough heat to bring the crabs back to a boil within 15 minutes.

Note: When water comes to a boil again, there should be barely enough water to cover crabs.

STUFFED MUSHROOMS WITH CRABMEAT

12-18 large fresh mushrooms
2 tbsps. butter
2 tbsps. minced garlic
2 tbsps. finely chopped parsley
2 tbsps. finely chopped green onions
3 tbsps. chopped mushroom stems
1 full cup crabmeat
¼ cup unseasoned breadcrumbs
3 ozs. Chablis wine

Remove stems from mushrooms and save for filling. Saute mushroom caps in butter until tender. Do not overcook. Set aside and save butter stock. In another pan, use the remaining tablespoon of butter and saute mushroom bits with minced garlic, parsley, and green onions. Stir constantly and cook over low fire for about five minutes. Add crabmeat and stir mixture constantly. Sprinkle in plain bread crumbs to make filling more solid. Add Chablis wine for flavor and liquid. Also add butter in which mushroom caps were cooked. Remove pan from burner and carefully stuff mushroom caps with mixture, placing them on broiler tin that has been covered with aluminum foil. Garnish with thin strips of Danish Havarti cheese or substitute with a similar cheese. Place in broiler and thoroughly heat. Remove when cheese strips show signs of melting. Serve at once.

CRABMEAT IMPERIAL

1 green pepper, finely diced
2 pimentos, finely diced
1 tbsp. mustard
1 tsp. salt
½ tsp. white pepper
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup mayonnaise
3 lb. lump crabmeat

Mix green pepper and pimentos, add mustard, salt, pepper, eggs, and mayonnaise. Mix well. Gently fold in crabmeat. Divide mixture into 8 crab shells or ramekins, heaping lightly. Top with a dot of mayonnaise and sprinkle with paprika. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes. Serves 8.

CRAB STUFFED AVOCADO

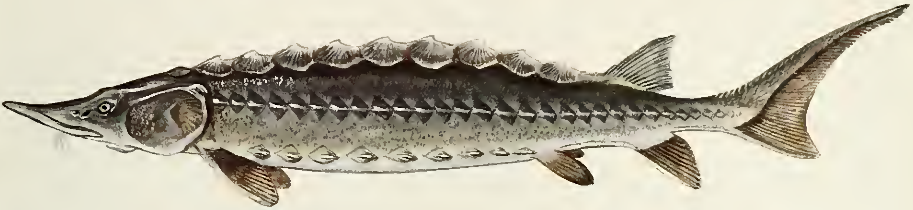
2 avocados
3 tbsps. olive oil
1 tbsp. tarragon vinegar
½ cup thinly sliced celery
1 tbsp. chives
1 tbsp. minced stuffed olives
1 tsp. minced parsley
1 tbsp. minced green pepper
½ lb. crab meat
1 tbsp. lemon juice
¼ cup mayonnaise

In a mixing bowl, beat together oil and vinegar. Add celery, chives, olives, parsley, and green pepper. Add crab meat and mix gently. Add lemon juice and enough mayonnaise to bind all ingredients together. Chill thoroughly. When ready to serve cut avocados lengthwise into halves. Fill with crab meat mixture and serve on lettuce. Serves 4.

MARINATED CRABS OR CRAB CLAWS

1 doz. boiled crabs, cleaned
1-8 oz. bottle Wishbone Italian dressing
2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
2 lemons, use juice
2 cloves garlic, pressed
1 tsp. mustard with horseradish
1 rib celery
bell peppers
onions
carrots
⅓ cup green onions
⅓ cup minced parsley

Boil crabs, clean, and crack claws, leaving tips on. Mix dressing, Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice, garlic and mustard. Pour over crabs. Add crabs, bell peppers, parsley, onions, and carrots to the marinade also. Marinate for a minimum of 12 hours, covered, in the refrigerator. Stir occasionally. Really Southern, y'all!



FISH OF LOUISIANA

ILLUSTRATED BY DUANE RAVER, JR.

ATLANTIC STURGEON

Dubbed with the scientific name *Ancipenser oxyrhynchus,* which is Latin for "sharp-nosed sturgeon," the Atlantic sturgeon, or common sturgeon as it sometimes is called, is a freshwater fish known to occur in Louisiana. The one significant point, however, is it doesn't occur often . . . not on hook and line, that is.

Sturgeon are primarily commercial fish, so when they are taken in Louisiana rivers it usually is in a net or a trawl. Of course, some sturgeon have been caught on rods and reels, and the species does put up a rather game objection to having a hook in its mouth. But . . . more often than not, the fish, when they are found, end up in webbing instead of on monofilament.

Sturgeon range way back in geologic history and are as primitive as the bowfin (commonly called the choupique) and paddlefish. Even its appearance is primitive—its shape somewhat resembles Captain Nemo's "Nautilus" of the Jules Verne's classic *"Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea."* The fish, grayish-green in color, has a sharpened but flattened head covered with bony plates, and a long pointed snout. Along its back and down its sides are raised, strange-looking scutes. Otherwise, the fish is scaleless. Its tail resembles that of a shark, curving upward in an arch that rises well above the hump on its back.

Because it has very poor eyesight, the fish must find food by relying on sensory barbels which hang from the forward underside of its snout. Anatomically, however, it is suited for this. Since it has no teeth and its mouth resembles the suckerfish, when the sturgeon feeds it roams along the bottoms of rivers and channels, sensing food items with the barbels and sucking them up in its mouth as it passes over them. Its primary diet includes insect larvae, worms, crawfish, snails, and other small fish.

Anglers who fish for sturgeon occasionally on rods and reels use nightcrawlers, scraps of meat, blood baits, and cut baits made from suckerfish, carp, and other freshwater fish.

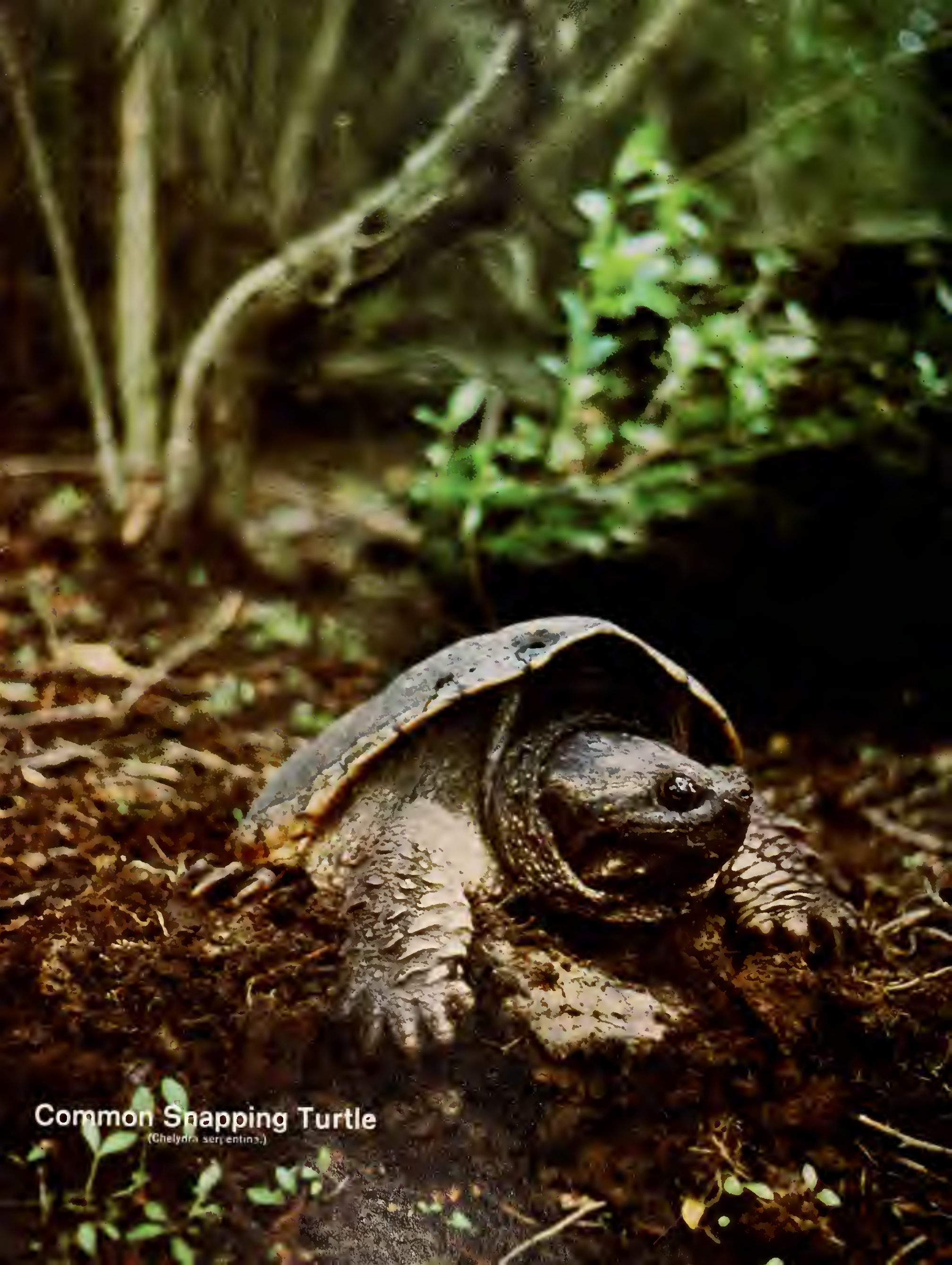
Sturgeon grow very slowly. Seldom do they mature before they are twelve years old. But to counter this phenomenon they have extreme longivity. Some individuals reportedly reach 75 years old and older.

The entire sturgeon species, however, is believed to have declined over the years for two major reasons—commercial overfishing in the past (since the roe—eggs—of the sturgeon produce the finest caviar on the market), and widespread pollution of the water bodies in which sturgeon thrive.

Based on limited data, biologists believe that the Atlantic sturgeon spawns in depths of 15 to 20 feet. Its eggs are blackish in color, about one-tenth inch in diameter, sticky, and adhere to water plants and stones on the bottom. Within three to seven days after deposition of the eggs, tiny sturgeon hatch out. It is thought a single female of the species can lay between 2 and 3 million eggs in one season. Full grown Atlantic sturgeon may range from 2½ to 10 feet in length.

The adult sturgeon is an excellent source of good protein and very high in food value. Fresh, the fish tends to have a flesh which is somewhat course; smoked, it is a gourmet's delicacy. Sturgeon eggs, those primarily used commercially as caviar, sell upward from $1.50 to $175.00 per pound.

Most sturgeon taken in Louisiana are harvested from the Mississippi River, the Atchafalaya River, and the Pearl River systems. They have been said to "straggle" into the Gulf of Mexico and into the Mississippi Sound, but generally they stay well into, or very near, these freshwater rivers.



Common Snapping Turtle
(Chelydra serpentina.)